(b) whether these also include some soldiers, who were mistakenly declared as absconders by the Army authorities during the Kargil conflict; and

(c) if so, what action has been taken to secure their release?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) It is estimated that 17 Army Officers, 2 Junior Commissioned Officers and 19 other Ranks (OR) are currently in Pakistan jails.

(b) 2 soldiers (OR) of the Indian Army, were declared deserters on 17th September 1999, in the absence of any knowledge of their whereabouts by a court of inquiry. These two soldiers were taken off the deserters' list when Pakistan confirmed that they were in their custody.

(c) Both these soldiers have since been released by Pakistan on 9th August, 2004.

Accidents of MiG-21 aircrafts

†1489. DR. PRABHA THAKUR: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of MiG-21 aircrafts that have met with accidents so far

(b) the factors responsible for accident of these aircrafts;

(c) the number of MiG-21 aircrafts still included in the fleet; and

(d) the details of plan Government have formulated to check such accidents in future?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) A total number of 319 MiG-21 aircraft have met Cat-I accidents since the year 1971-1972.

I (b) Major causes of these accidents are Technical Defect, Human Error and Bird Hit.

(c) The Indian Air Force (IAF) have adequate number of MiG aircraft along with other aircraft to safeguard the interest of our country. However, the exact number of such aircraft can not be divulged in the interest of national security.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(d) A continuous and multi-faceted effort is always afoot by Indian Air Force to enhance and upgrade flight safety. Measures to enhance the quality of training to improve the skill levels, ability to exercise sound judgement and situational awareness of pilots are being pursued. Constant interaction with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) and Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) of concerned countries is also maintained to overcome the technical defects of aircrafts. Besides, anti-bird measures are also undertaken.

Cheetah helicopter crash

1490. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a 'Cheetah' helicopter of the IAF crashed on 22nd April, 2004, near LoC in Jammu and Kashmir;

(b) if so, the cause of crash as established in the statutory inquiry conducted into the accident;

(c) the extent of loss caused due to the crash; and

(d) the number of helicopters of this category of IAF which met with accidents and were lost during the last five years, year-wise and how the loss was made up?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The cause of this crash was Human Error (Aircrew).

(c) This was a Category-I accident in which the helicopter was destroyed and the captain sustained fatal injuries. There was no loss to the civilian life and property.

(d) The details of helicopters that crashed during the last five years are as under:—

Financial Year	No. of crash
1999-2000	01
2000-2001	03